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REF: SAIGON 26231

SUBJ: THIEU - KY

1. AS THE RESULT OF MEETINGS WITHIN THE LAST 24 HOURS WITH [redacted] FOLLOWING ARE OUR IMPRESSIONS OF CURRENT SITUATION.

2. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS OVER PAST FEW MONTHS HAS BUILT UP GROWING SUSPICIONS AND MISTRUST BETWEEN KY AND THIEU AS A RESULT OF THIER FAILURE TO DISCUSS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY FRANKLY TOGETHER, AND THE MANEUVERS, PRESSURES AND RUMORS BROUGHT

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TO BEAR BY THEIR RESPECTIVE SUPPORTERS. [redacted] SAID KY'S CAMPAIGN TO WIN THE MILITARY CANDIDACY HAD STARTED AS EARLY AS JANUARY AND HE HAD NEVER TRIED TO DISCUSS QUESTION OPENLY WITH THIEU. THE GENERALS AROUND KY AND THE "BABY TURKS" SUPPORTING HIM AT LOWER LEVELS, HAD ACCENTUATED THE DIVISION IN THE ARMED FORCES AND HAD INTRODUCED THE ELEMENT OF RIVALRY BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN GROUPS IN THE ARMY LEADERSHIP. ON KY'S SIDE, ACCORDING TO [redacted] EVERY EFFORT TO MAKE THIEU REACH A DECISION AND TO DISCUSS MATTER FRANKLY HAD FROM THE VERY BEGINNING BEEN MET WITH EVASION AND REFUSAL TO TALK ABOUT IT. [redacted] SAID HE HAD URGED THE TWO PRINCIPALS TO GET TOGETHER BEFORE HE LEFT IN JANUARY AND HAD RENEWED THIS URGING IN MARCH BEFORE THE GUAM MEETING, →

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BUT THEY HAD NOT DONE SO. BOTH [redacted] AGREED THAT THE SITUATION BETWEEN THE TWO MEN WAS APPROACHING A CRITICAL POINT, WITH FEELING RUNNING HIGH AMONG THEIR ADHERENTS, BUT BOTH OF THEM SEEMED TO FEEL THAT IT HAD NOT BECOME IMPOSSIBLE FOR KY AND THIEU TO RESOLVE THE MATTER PERSONALLY IF THEY COULD BE PERSUADED TO DO SO.

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3. [redacted] IN CONVERSATION MAY 22 WITH POLITICAL COUNSELOR, SAID HE THOUGHT THIEU MIGHT MAKE HIS FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON MAY 24. HE SAID THIEU HAD NOT MADE A FINAL CHOICE ON HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BUT HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIEU'S TICKET WOULD BE BASICALLY A SOUTHERN ONE. [redacted] ALLEGED THAT MILITARY SUPPORT IN THE BROADEST SENSE, I.E., APART FROM THE LEADING NORTHERN GENERALS IMMEDIATELY AROUND KY AND THE BABY TURKS, FAVORED THIEU. [redacted] ON THE OTHER HAND CONSIDERED THAT THIEU'S INDECISIVENESS AND REFUSAL TO FACE THE ISSUE HAD ALIENATED MANY OF THE ARMY LEADERS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIEU'S PERSONAL POSITION AND PRESTIGE WERE IMPORTANT FACTORS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT, WHICH THEY ALL RECOGNIZED. [redacted] CONFIRMED THAT AT A DINNER MEETING IN BIEN HOA MAY 20, THERE HAD BEEN A LENGTHY DISCUSSION AMONG THE GENERALS CLOSE TO KY ABOUT WHAT TO DO, AT WHICH [redacted] HAD BEEN PRESENT. HE THOUGHT THAT FURTHER EFFORTS WOULD BE MADE BY THEM TO FIND AN AMICABLE SOLUTION, BUT HE HAD NO SPECIFIC COMMENTS AS TO WHAT THEY MIGHT BE. [redacted] EXPRESSED AS HIS PERSONAL VIEW THAT EVEN IF THIEU ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY FORMALLY, HE WOULD HIGHLY WITHDRAW BEFORE THE FINAL FILING

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DATE IN EARLY JULY, POSSIBLY THROWING HIS SUPPORT TO A SOUTHERN CIVILIAN CANDIDATE (PRESUMABLY TRAN VAN HUONG). [redacted] SEEMED TO AGREE THAT IN THIS CASE DIVISION IN THE MILITARY WOULD BE INEVITABLE AND MIGHT WELL DIVIDE ON REGIONAL GROUNDS.
4. FOLLOWING [redacted] CONVERSATION WITH POLITICAL COUNSELOR LAST EVENING, [redacted] HAD DINNER WITH [redacted] CONVERSATION WITH [redacted] TOOK PLACE AT BREAKFAST MORNING MAY 23. BOTH MEN REALIZED THAT THEIR ROLES MIGHT BE CRITICAL ONES IN PREVENTING HASTY ACTIONS OR DECISIONS BY THIEU AND KY WHICH MIGHT MAKE SITUATION DETERIORATE EVEN MORE. [redacted] SAID HE BELIEVED HE COULD STILL TALK FRANKLY AND FREELY WITH THIEU EVEN THOUGH HAK

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REALIZED HE WAS CLASSED AS A KY SUPPORTER. HE HOPED TO SEE THIEU MAY 24 TO DISCUSS SITUATION WITH HIM. ALSO SAID VAT HE HAD HAD SEVERAL LONG DISCUSSIONS WITH KY ABOUT CONCERN IN WASHINGTON FROM THE PRESIDENT ON DOWN, AND THAT KY WAS FULLY AWARE OF THIS FEELING AND OF THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE BY OFF-THE-CUFF STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS.

5. DURING BREAKFAST WITH MAY 23, PRIME MINISTER'S ASSISTANT, TRUONG THAI TON, JOINED LATER. HE SAID THAT HE HAD ACCOMPANIED KY TO THE GRADUATION CEREMONY AT VUNG TAU MAY 16 AND THAT KY HAD HAD A ONE TO TWO HOUR CONVERSATION WITH HUONG

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WHICH HAD BEEN VERY FREINDLY AND FRANK. TON SAID HE HAD STAYED ON WITH HUONG AFTERWARDS AND DISCUSSED MATTERS FURTHER WITH HIM. HE AND CLAIMED THAT AS A RESULT OF THIS KY-HUONG FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATION, SOME KIND OF A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING HAD EMERGED BETWEEN THEM. THEY CONFIRMED OUR IMPRESSION THAT HUONG WAS NOT AT THIS TIME CONTEMPLATING A TICKET IN WHICH HE WOULD COMBINE WITH EITHER KY OR THIEU. THEY FELT, HOWEVER, THAT THE CONVERSATION HAD CREATED AN UNDERSTANDING FOR THE FUTURE WHEREBY IF EITHER ONE OR THE OTHER WERE ELECTED PRESIDENT, THEY WOULD MAKE AN AMICABLE ARRANGEMENT FOR COOPERATION THEREAFTER. (COMMENT: THIS DOES NOT JIBE VERY WELL WITH HUONG'S STATEMENTS TO EMBASSY OFFICER REPORTED SAIGON 26352 IN WHICH HE CRITICIZED KY SHARPLY, BUT IT APPEARS THAT HUONG WAS IN ANY CASE NOT BEING VERY FORTHCOMING REGARDING HIS RELATIONSHIPS IN THAT CONVERSATION.)

6. THE TALKS WITH CONFIRMED OUR REPORT THAT THE CIVILIAN MEMBERS OF THE DIRECTORATE MET MAY 22 TO DISCUSS THE ELECTORAL LAW. (SEE SAIGON'S 26455 REPORTING THAT MEETING). APPARENTLY THERE WAS AGREEMENT THAT THE PROVISION FOR 30 ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO SPONSOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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SHOULD BE CHANGED AND THERE WAS ALSO GENERAL SENTIMENT FOR SOME KIND OF MINIMUM PERCENTAGE AND RUN-OFF ELECTION IF NECESSARY. THEY BOTH CONFIRMED THAT THE FULL DIRECTORATE WAS SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS THE ELECTORAL LAW MAY 24 AND MIGHT WELL DECIDE TO REQUEST ASSEMBLY TO RECONSIDER ONE OR BOTH OF THESE ARTICLES. ADVANCED SOME OF THE STANDARD ARGUMENTS AGAINST A RUN-OFF ELECTION, BUT ALLEGED THAT KY WAS NOT UNALTERABLY OPPOSED TO A MINIMUM PERCENTAGE. HE ALSO STATED THAT THE PROVISION IN THE ELECTORAL LAW FOR THE UPPER HOUSE FOR A DELAY UNTIL MID-DECEMBER WAS NOT INCLUDED AT KY'S REQUEST. HE

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ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS PROVISION HAD AROUSED FURTHER RESENTMENT AMONG THIEU'S SUPPORTERS AND THE CIVILIAN CANDIDATES BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED IT WOULD PROVIDE A THREE-MONTH PERIOD FOR THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION AND INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE UPPER HOUSE ELECTIONS. THOUGHT THAT THIS PROVISION MIGHT ULTIMATELY CHANGED TO PROVIDE ONCE AGAIN FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE UPPER HOUSE, ALTHOUGH HE BELIEVED THIS QUESTION WOULD NOT BE FORMALLY SETTLED UNTIL THE ASSEMBLY HAD FINISHED CONSIDERATION OF THE LAW.
7. FOREGOING IS REPORTED FOR INFORMATION. WE WILL COMMENT

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SEPARATELY ON QUESTIONS RAISED IN STATE 198956 AND 198958. I PLAN TO REQUEST APPOINTMENTS TO SEE THIEU AND KY SEPARATELY SOON. TIMING WILL DEPEND SOMEWHAT ON HOW EFFORTS TO MEDIATE BY (AND POSSIBLY PROGRESS. I HAVE OTHER MATTERS TO TAKE UP WITH BOTH THIEU AND KY, BUT WILL OF COURSE DISCUSS THIS SITUATION WITH THEM ALONG THE LINES INDICATED IN STATE 198958. THESE VIEWS WERE CONVEYED TO BOTH AND THE LATTER WAS, AS INDICATED, VERY CONSCIOUS OF WASHINGTON'S CONCERNS ON THE SUBJECT. WE WILL ALSO BE SSKING FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING THE CURRENT MOOD AMONG THE PRINCIPAL GENERALS AND THE ROLE THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO PLAY IN RESOLVING THIS DIFFICULT SITUATION AND ITS THREAT TO THE UNITY OF THE MILITARY.

BUNKER
BT

NOTE: PASSED S/S-O, WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA AT 8:44 A.M. 5/23/67

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